



Dennis McFarlane

R/C Report

AquaCraft Cajun Commander

It flies, but in the water, not in the air.

Airboats have been featured in television shows and feature-length cinema productions for years. They're everywhere, from reality shows to nature productions. I've even seen them in cooking shows. Chuck Norris was screaming across the Everglades in the 1985 action film *Invasion U.S.A.* If a person walks into your store and asks, "What's an airboat?" I'd almost venture a reply along the lines of, "Are you an ostrich with your head buried in the sand?" Seriously, I think a person who has never been exposed in some basic manner to an airboat would have to be a space alien from another planet.

Just as full-scale airboats have been around for years, so have model airboats. Back in the early 1970s, I built both Dumas airboat offerings, the Swamp Buggy and Li'l Swamp Buggy. It wasn't necessarily out of an uncontrollable urge to build an airboat; it was just something to do with the Cox .049 (Li'l Swamp Buggy) and O.S. .35 (Swamp Buggy) sitting on the shelf collecting dust during the frozen months of a long Midwest winter. Incredibly, although mine are long gone, both models are still available, although the customer will have to do a rather in-depth search for an available .049 with a throttle should he want to build a glow powered Li'l Swamp Buggy.

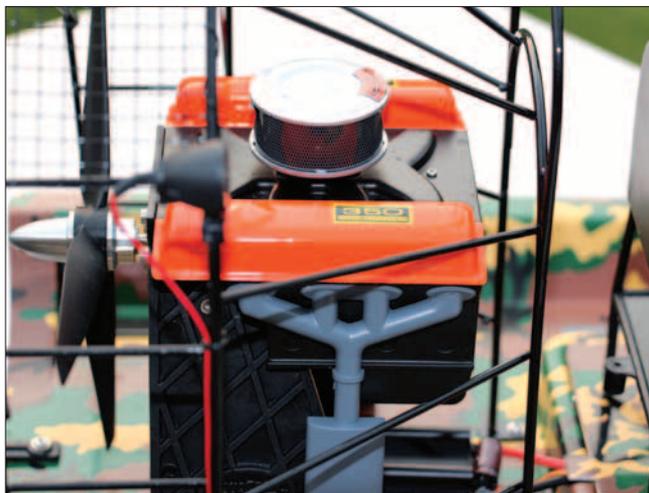
Just like every aspect of radio control, electric propulsion and ready-to-run products have become extremely popular — actually rather dominant — especially for the newcomer to the hobby. AquaCraft has filled the airboat market with a couple of fun offerings. Reviewed several years ago was the mini Alligator Tours airboat. This is a fun product and is still in



use as a retrieval boat for the various waterborne craft that can get "stuck" in the pond when something goes wrong.

At 18 inches in length, the Alligator Tours is a nice size, and when first introduced it sold well. The boat does okay on water and snow, but it can stick a bit on dry grass. This is to be expected with a boat powered by a brushed motor and nickel chemistry battery pack. The combo was appropriate in its time and is still a great offering for younger drivers and beginners, but it's a little dated by today's standards.

Enter the AquaCraft Cajun Commander. The boat is 27.5 inches long with a width of 14.5 inches, so it's considerably larger than the Alligator Tours. The Cajun Commander is manufactured using an ABS hull that is scribed in some really slick looking camouflage trim. Details include 12 LED spotlights — needed when hunting gators at night — that have a separate power supply and a nice faux V-8 engine. The airboat is offered as a RTR (Ready To Run) only package, which includes the boat and a Tactic TTX300 3-channel 2.4GHz wheel style transmitter and matching TTR325 Receiver.



Out of the box the Cajun Commander features a number of scale features, such as this nicely done faux 350ci V-8 engine.

Mounted from the factory is an 1800kV brushless outrunner motor along with a waterproof 50Amp ESC. The steering servo is of the standard torque and speed variety, and it's connected directly to twin rudders. The motor spins a fiberglass composite three-blade propeller, which is housed in a painted metal cage (no flimsy plastic



The equipment compartment is quite roomy containing the receiver, steering servo, LED battery and the run pack. (I should mention that the boat is shrouded with this power combination).

Not included with the boat is the recommended 3S 2200mAh LiPo battery and battery charger. These items must be supplied by the purchaser. There is no question the 3S 2200mAh lithium battery has become an industry standard, and they are extremely common.

Myself, Dennis Andreas and hopefully every dealer of radio control products encourages the end user to read the instruction manual. The ideal time is while waiting for the battery to charge, but in the case of the Cajun

Commander, the manual is only four pages, and that includes the front cover. The offering is so complete that there's nothing for the end user to focus on except how to install the batteries in the transmitter, the LED light battery holder and the boat's run pack. The rest of the manual is the required safety warnings and an always helpful troubleshooting guide.

With several of the recommended run batteries charged, the boat was taken to the local pond for evaluation. Once the battery was installed, throttle and steering were checked for proper movement. The boat was placed on the grass, a grin was applied, and the throttle was punched to full power.

Launching a high-performance racing boat can be a tricky proposition. Drop the boat in the water at too steep an angle and it will submarine; at too shallow an angle, the propeller will begin to cavitate and the boat isn't going anywhere. Both launches elicit a rather penetrating glare from my wife, Cindy, who's my boat driver, and who also loves to race against Mike Zaborowski, the Cajun Commander's designer. However, this boat is simple. Place



Launching is simple. Place it on the ground and apply throttle. She'll move across the grass and into the water with ease.

the boat on the ground as near or far from the water as desired and let 'er rip.

It was mentioned that the Alligator Tours could stick at times to dry grass and it sometimes needed a little boost to get it moving. Not so with the Cajun Commander. Acceleration is immediate; the boat goes skimming across the grass onto the beach and into the water without skipping a beat. On the water, the boat performs admirably. The speed is more than fast enough, and through all sorts of straight runs and side slips control is easily maintained. At the speeds needed for photographs there wasn't the slightest hint the Cajun Commander would dig in and flip.

This has been the wettest season in Chicagoland since weather has been recorded.

Constant rain has saturated the ground, making many lawns too wet to even walk on (I'd never experienced mowing mud until this year). What a perfect environment for running an airboat.

Not even mentioned in the manual, let alone recommended, is the installation of a 4S 2200mAh LiPo running pack. The motor and ESC can handle the extra voltage, so this isn't an issue. Wow, this thing flies across wet grass. With this battery it's really on the edge of sane controllability. Although

I'm sure before long a couple of guys will get together to race — make something move and a race will eventually begin — the 4S pack isn't as much fun on water. Real or imagined, there was a nagging feeling that at any moment air was going to get under the hull and flip the boat over, ending all the fun. That said, I can't see any dealer complaining because a customer wants to add a couple of 4S packs to go along with the recommended 3S packs needed to run the boat -- 3S on water, 4S on land. Either way the Cajun Commander is an absolute blast to tear through the countryside.



Even though the speed was held in check for photos, this

It took a few years before the right power combination finally became available and has made airboats the performers customers have always wanted. Glow was fine, but in all reality, the noise made the boats seem like they were going faster than they really were. Brushed electric was great for local ponds where noise was an issue, but the available power was at times an issue. Not so with

brushless and lithium. The Cajun Commander is a great boat. It's fast, really on the edge of controllability, and this is what the thrill seeker is always looking for.

Get a couple for your shelves; they are fun to drive, look fantastic and move off the shelf as fast as you can get them in stock. Like all AquaCraft products, the Cajun Commander is available only through Great Planes. **HM**

Adding Details to the Cajun Commander

As mentioned, out of the box the Cajun Commander is a nicely detailed boat, but there is much more that can be done. Right off the bat the boat needs a driver. Taking a trip to the local big-box discount store, one of the popular female (my wife insisted on a female) dolls was purchased (the one on sale). Out of the box she's more than a little tall — over seven feet tall in scale — but she fits the seat well. To make her fit in the available space between the seats, about an inch or so was removed from her knee area and bendable legs were made with hinge points.

For the customer that has access to a 3D printer there are even more detail pieces for the boat on the AquaCraft website. Available are a footrest, duck call and rifle rack. These are not available as an aftermarket



sale. In order to construct, if this is the correct word, these add-on scale accessories, the customer will need access to a 3D printer.

To the best of my knowledge, this is the first time a manufacturer has offered free downloadable files for scale accessories. 3D printers are dropping in price dramatically, and it is predicted there will be one in every office shortly. I do not currently have

access to a 3D printer, so making the accessories was not an option, but from the photos the items look good and would be a nice addition to an already great looking model airboat.

This may be the first time downloadable files have been offered for accessories, but it won't be the last, and there is no doubt that in the future, 3D printing of scale components will be a significant part of our industry. **HM**

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